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National Programming for Multicultural Audiences -- Aiming for Effectiveness and Efficiency

By Richard H. Madden

Each of the radio program series funded by CPB is plainly aimed at meeting some aspect of public radio's mission. Several are aimed at meeting public radio's toughest goals -- innovation and diversity.

But are they also serving multicultural audiences effectively and efficiently? Serving these audiences is an essential element of CPB's and the system's missions. And, if these programs serve them both effectively and efficiently, what does that imply for other funders and producers of programming?

These questions arise from the conclusion that how public radio tries to serve these audiences is just as important as how the programming itself relates to either the broader objectives of public radio's mission or the multicultural character of the production team. That conclusion was probably the most important outcome of the comprehensive study that was summarized in the paper "Myth and the Minority Audience: Black and Hispanic Use of Public and Commercial Radio," which CPB published in *Research Notes* in February 1989.

Programming Economics

To answer whether CPB-funded programs are effective and efficient in serving multicultural audiences, CPB decided to use a method of analysis known as "programming economics," which was developed primarily by Audience Research Analysis. This kind of analysis is discussed more fully in the pamphlet *Programming Economics*, which CPB published in June 1989, but it is worth a brief digression here. Two key calculations are applied in programming economics:

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- The first focuses on effectiveness, looking at the audience use of a program or series, as measured in listener-hours.

- The second determines efficiency, coupling the listener use data with total production cost data for programs or series.

The effectiveness, or listener-hour, measure combines the number of persons served and the length of time they are served. This transcends notions of cume, AQH, and time-spent-listening by combining them into a single measure of gross consumption. One person listening to a program for five hours results in five listener-hours; five persons listening for one hour apiece also yield five listener-hours.

The principle behind the efficiency analysis is illustrated by asking which of the following is preferable:

- a program that costs $160,000 and enjoys 75,000 listener-hours? or

- a program that costs $40,000 and enjoys 75,000 listener-hours?

Both programs have the same effectiveness (i.e., the same number of listener-hours), but the second is at one-quarter the cost. Which is the more efficient program? Assuming the same intrinsic merit and mission, the answer is clearly the latter.

Determining the program's efficiency, i.e., the cost of serving one listener for one hour (or CPL, cost per listener-hour), permits a comparison across program, format, and station types. Under this model, differences in production cost or in airtime required between one program and another are counterbalanced by differences in audience expectations; the CPL formula scales all programs or series against a common yardstick -- the cost of serving one listener for one hour.

This comparison can be enhanced by establishing benchmarks to which all programs can be compared. One such benchmark would be a CPL averaged over all programming broadcast systemwide. Such a calculation, for FY 1989 for example, should include:

- all stations -- say, the 312 Community Service Grantees;

- all programming -- more than 2 million hours of national and local programming;

- all listening to that programming -- more than 100 million listener-hours a week (i.e., the effectiveness of the programming), and

- all costs -- the estimated $300 million FY 1989 costs of providing this programming systemwide.

In Spring 1989, the cost of serving one public radio listener for one hour -- the systemwide CPL -- happened to average out at a little more than a nickel, about $.058.

No series will be as efficient in its early years as established programming (say, *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*) is now. Those two programs, in isolation, currently cost about $.014 to serve one listener for one hour. On the other hand, even in their early lives, national programs should be more efficient in providing their unique public service than the average program of all types carried by stations, i.e., they should cost less than $.058. For continuing series in particular, such efficiencies should be demonstrable whether or not the production costs are defrayed by CPB or other funders, which could include stations.

The eight CPB-funded continuing series listed in Table 1 have total annual production costs of nearly $6 million. (A description of each series is provided at the end of this paper.) CPB provides about 40 percent of the total. Accordingly, relationships between cost and audience, i.e., the effectiveness and efficiency of programming, must be considered given the scarce production funds available to producers from stations, CPB, and other sources.

Using the programming economics methods described above, CPLs were calculated for these eight series for the Winter through Summer quarters of 1989. Audience data were provided by Arbitron through the Radio Research Consortium.

In these calculations, four programs (*Fresh Air, Marketplace, Crossroads,* and *Afropop*) were more efficient than the average program (national or local) in serving their audiences, i.e., their CPL was less than the system average of $.058.[1] Remember: the $.058 CPL system average is not the average of just these eight programs but of all programs, national and local, systemwide.

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[1] The system CPL of $.058 includes all local costs, e.g., transmitter utility costs. The costs for each series include only production costs.

Accordingly, all eight of these CPB-funded series could have been above system average, or all could have been below average.

A ranking of these eight, from most efficient to least efficient, is also provided. The break point between those series more efficient than the average national or local program and those less efficient is between *Crossroads* and *Soundprint*, i.e., between fourth and fifth. The average series above the break point was almost six times more efficient in serving audiences than those below.

Table 1. Production cost per listener-hour and rank for all listeners, Winter - Summer quarters 1989

	Cost per listener-hour (CPL)	Rank by CPL for all listeners
Fresh Air	**$0.020**	**1**
Marketplace	**0.028**	**2**
Afropop	**0.050**	**3**
Crossroads	**0.051**	**4**
Soundprint	**0.072**	**5**
Good Evening	**0.102**	**6**
Latin File	**0.297**	**7**
New American Radio	**0.386**	**8**

How to read this table: During the first three calendar quarters of 1989, the production cost for *Fresh Air* of serving one listener for one hour averaged $.02. The same cost for *New American Radio* was $.386. Stated differently, *Fresh Air* was 19 times more efficient in providing its public service than *New American Radio.*

Source: CPB Radio Program Fund

Not only were these four series more efficient, they were also more effective. *Fresh Air, Marketplace, Crossroads,* and *Afropop* were more than five times more effective in serving audiences, enjoying nearly 575,000 listener-hours on

average, while the remaining series enjoyed only 104,000 listener-hours on average.

Multicultural Audiences

Moving back to the core of this discussion, which of these series are more effective and more efficient in serving their audiences? Program economics offers some answers.

Because Arbitron identifies Hispanic listeners as a distinct ethnic group in markets with high concentrations of Hispanics, listening to these series by Hispanics can be estimated.[2] Thus, Hispanic audience data can be folded into the programming economics formula with total production cost data to calculate an indexed Hispanic CPL.

These kinds of indexed Hispanic CPLs and rank-orders were calculated for the same eight CPB-funded series as above, as shown in Table 2. Interpretation of

Table 2. Production cost per listener-hour and rank for Hispanic listeners, Winter - Summer quarters 1989

	Cost per listener-hour	Rank by CPL for all listeners	Rank by index for Hispanic listeners
Fresh Air	**$0.020**	**1**	**1**
Marketplace	**0.028**	**2**	**3**
Afropop	**0.050**	**3**	**4**
Crossroads	**0.051**	**4**	**2**
Soundprint	**0.072**	**5**	**8**
Good Evening	**0.102**	**6**	**7**
Latin File	**0.297**	**7**	**5**
New American Radio	**0.386**	**8**	**6**

Source: CPB Radio Program Fund

[2] Indeed, under Arbitron's current practices, about 60 percent of Hispanic listeners age 12 and above nationwide are *identified as Hispanic* in the reporting of their radio listening data. The remainder are represented in Arbitron's samples, but are not identified as to race or ethnicity.

the indexed CPLs for any subset of the audience is complicated. Comparisons to the CPLs for all listeners would be incorrect, because the production costs cannot be allocated among the ethnic groups into which the listeners are segmented. Comparisons from program to program of these indexed CPLs are fully legitimate, however, so to streamline the presentation, only the rankings are provided in the remainder of this paper.

As with the systemwide CPL benchmark for all listeners, a systemwide benchmark for Hispanic listeners was also determined. In this ranking, *Fresh Air*, *Crossroads*, and *Marketplace* on average were almost six times more efficient in serving Hispanic audiences than the other studied series. They were also eight times more effective in reaching Hispanics, enjoying 10,000 Hispanic-listener-hours on average, compared to 1,250 Hispanic-listener-hours on average for the remaining series.

Arbitron also identifies Black listeners as a distinct racial group in markets with high concentrations of African-Americans. Thus, listening to these series by Black persons can also be estimated.[3] Thus, audience data for Black listeners,

Table 3. Production cost per listener-hour and ranks for all listeners, and for Hispanic, Black, and all other listeners, Winter - Summer quarters 1989

	Cost per listener-hour (CPL)	Rank by CPL for all listeners	Rank - index for Hispanic listeners	Rank - index for Black listeners	Rank - index for all other listeners
Fresh Air	$0.020	1	1	2	1
Marketplace	0.028	2	3	5	2
Afropop	0.050	3	4	1	4
Crossroads	0.051	4	2	3	3
Soundprint	0.072	5	8	4	5
Good Evening	0.102	6	7	6	6
Latin File	0.297	7	5	7	7
New American Radio	0.386	8	6	8	8

Source: CPB Radio Program Fund

[3] Under Arbitron's current practices, about 66 percent of Black listeners age 12 and above nationwide are *identified as Black* in the reporting of their radio listening data. The remainder are represented in the samples, but are not identified as to race or ethnicity.

too, can be folded into the programming economics formula with total production cost data to calculate an indexed Black CPL. Table 3 extends the data in Table 2 to reflect the rankings of the eight series for Black audiences.

As with the total audience and with Hispanic listeners, a systemwide benchmark was calculated for the average of all national or local programs. By these calculations, five programs are more efficient than the average national or local program in serving Black audiences. In order, they are: *Afropop, Fresh Air, Crossroads, Soundprint,* and *Marketplace.* Indeed, these series were nearly 13 times more efficient on average in serving listeners than the other studied series. They were also more than 10 times more effective in reaching Black listeners, enjoying 28,000 Black listener-hours on average, compared to 2,700 Black listener-hours for the other studied series.

The final column of Table 3 includes rank-orders for "all other" listeners.[4] Three series were more efficient than the average national or local program. In order they were: *Fresh Air, Marketplace,* and *Crossroads.* Indeed, they were almost six times more efficient than the other studied series. They were also seven times more effective in reaching listeners, enjoying 680,000 listener-hours on average, compared to 9,500 listener-hours for the other studied series.

Looking Beyond the Numbers, What Does This All Mean?

Moving beyond the numbers, are any CPB programs consistently more effective and efficient in serving multicultural audiences? *Crossroads, Fresh Air,* and *Marketplace* consistently perform above the systemwide averages in effectively and efficiently serving identifiable, discrete segments of the audience, i.e., Hispanics, Blacks and "all others." For this analysis, the audience was segmented along a racial and ethnic dimension, so these programs can be considered to be particularly effective and efficient in serving multicultural audiences.

To assist in developing other new programs that evidence the same qualities, what characteristics do *Crossroads, Fresh Air,* and *Marketplace* have in common? While this is highly subjective, it is possible to sketch some programmatic, carriage, and format traits based on this and other research:

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[4] They include both Hispanic and Black persons who are not identified by ethnicity or race, other minority listeners (Arbitron does not identify members of other minorities), and the remainder of public radio's audiences.

Programmatic:

- Each is good radio, as recognized by the number of people served.
- Each maintains the consistent core appeal of public radio, i.e., the series are stimulating, intelligent, unique, valuable and entertaining.

Carriage:

- The quality and appeal of each is such that they enjoy carriage on a significant number of stations in communities with significant numbers of Blacks and Hispanics in the population and, most likely, in the stations' overall audiences.
- The quality and appeal of each is such that they enjoy better placement in station schedules.
- The frequency of each is such that they enjoy consistent placement in station schedules.

Format:

- Each is designed to fit within the context of a larger, consistent station format making the programming more accessible to all listeners and, as a result, apt to be heard by more Black and Hispanic listeners. Black and Hispanics, and by implication, other ethnic groups, tune in to these series and their reasons for doing so are largely for the same reasons that non-ethnic audiences tune in. They tune in to formats.

While these are common factors, distinctions remain. One is independently produced; the others are produced by stations. One costs about $350,000 per year to produce; each of the others costs more than $1 million. Two are daily programs; the other is weekly. In one case, the production team is multicultural. And so forth.

Clearly, audiences of differing cultures have chosen to enfranchise *Crossroads*, *Fresh Air*, and *Marketplace* via their listening. The producers of these series must respond in kind, by serving these varied audiences with the appropriate content and perspective. As with all audiences, however, the franchise is a temporary one. Indeed, while the factors that suggest these series are more effective and efficient in serving a multicultural audience can be identified, the series are not static offerings. Audiences will shift as frequently as producers adjust their production team, program content, budgets, and production approach,

and as stations adjust their local schedules. And, the appeal can change as new, different -- perhaps better, more effective and more efficient -- programs emerge in the public radio marketplace.

And, it is the vitality of the current public radio marketplace that offers opportunities and challenges for any producer. For example, *Afropop*, with an audience that is one third Black, is becoming *Afropop Worldwide*. Will it be able to retain its effectiveness and efficiency in serving Black listeners while broadening its appeal?

Other, broader questions suggested by this discussion are:

- Stating that some series are not as effective or as efficient as others does not mean that other system benefits (e.g. training) are not derived from such efforts. How should the acknowledged benefit of serving audiences be considered in light of these other system benefits?

- Stating that certain series are more effective in serving Blacks or Hispanics is not the same as stating that they have large Hispanic or Black audiences. It does, however, provide clues to the programs that may appeal to these audiences. What steps should public broadcasting be taking to increase these audiences?

- And, given what is known about public radio's audience, the series estimated to be more effective and efficient in serving multicultural audiences are likely serving the most educated members of the respective racial and ethnic groups. Is it possible to broaden public radio's appeal to include less educated audiences of all types?

Again, the key assumption in answering these and other questions will be the primary importance of public radio's missions, which include serving multicultural audiences. This paper demonstrates that certain CPB-funded series are more effective and efficient than others in serving such audiences. Indeed, several CPB-funded series are estimated to be more efficient than the average national or local program in serving multicultural audiences. These results reinforce the notion that the way public radio tries to serve multicultural audiences is just as important as the broader, mission-related objectives of the programming itself or the multicultural character of the production team.

Programs Discussed In This Paper

Title: *Afropop*
Producer: Sean Barlow, World Music Productions, Brooklyn, NY
Description: Weekly one-hour programs
Synopsis: A showcase of recordings from top African pop musicians.

Title: *Crossroads*
Producer: Elizabeth Perez-Luna, Earmark, Inc., Miami, FL
Description: Weekly half-hour and modules
Synopsis: A multicultural public affairs and arts magazine.

Title: *Fresh Air With Terry Gross*
Producer: Terry Gross, WHYY Radio, Philadelphia, PA
Description: 360 daily one-hour programs
Synopsis: An arts, culture and entertainment service featuring interviews with leading writers, actors, composers, musicians and filmmakers; as well as reviews of films, records and books; and previews of television shows.

Title: *Good Evening*
Producer: Tom Voegeli, Minnesota Public Radio, St. Paul, MN
Description: Weekly 90-minute programs
Synopsis: A variety program broadcast featuring several major acts along with a regular cast of supporting characters.

Title: *Latin File*
Producer: Benjamin Davis, National Public Radio, Washington, DC
Description: 260 15-minute Programs
Synopsis: A daily news service that addresses Hispanic issues in the U.S.A.

Title: *Marketplace*
Producer: Jim Russell, KUSC FM, Los Angeles, CA
Description: Daily half-hour programs and daily modules
Synopsis: A series to help listeners hear the world through a business/economic perspective and to relate the impact of the complex world of international commerce on their lives.

Title: *New American Radio*
Producer: Helen Thorington, New Radio and the Performing Arts, Inc., Brooklyn, NY
Description: Weekly half-hour programs
Synopsis: A radio arts series featuring commissioned works from producers encouraged to push the limits and conventions of radio genres; to develop new approaches to their materials; and to explore the limits of technology.

Title: *Soundprint*
Producer: Bill Siemering, WJHU Radio, Baltimore, MD
Description: Weekly half-hour programs
Synopsis: A series that investigates issues which need to be brought to the attention of the American people, profiles individuals who have had a significant impact in shaping thought in their discipline, and tells stories in a literary form reflecting the American experience and promoting cross-cultural understanding.